

AMENDED IN ASSEMBLY APRIL 23, 2009

CALIFORNIA LEGISLATURE—2009—10 REGULAR SESSION

ASSEMBLY BILL

No. 716

Introduced by Assembly Member Huber

February 26, 2009

An act to add Section 722 to the Military and Veterans Code, relating to veterans.

LEGISLATIVE COUNSEL'S DIGEST

AB 716, as amended, Huber. Veteran services: state agencies and departments.

Under existing law, the Department of Veterans Affairs has specified powers and duties relating to veterans.

This bill would ~~require~~ *state the intent of the Legislature that the Department of Veterans Affairs to establish a veteran data exchange system and enter into memorandums of understanding or interagency agreements with other state agencies and departments to ascertain the veteran status of all persons receiving services, benefits, or assistance from those state agencies and departments, as provided. This bill would require each state agency and department that provides services, benefits, or assistance to veterans to identify the services, benefits, or assistance that are being provided and the number of veterans who are using those services, benefits, or assistance and to submit a report to the Legislature, as provided.*

Vote: majority. Appropriation: no. Fiscal committee: yes.
State-mandated local program: no.

The people of the State of California do enact as follows:

SECTION 1. Section 722 is added to the Military and Veterans Code, to read:

722. (a) The Legislature finds and declares all of the following:

(1) The United States Department of Veterans Affairs spent \$6.1 billion in California in federal fiscal year 2006, \$2.66 billion of which was for disability payments to veterans. These disability payments are directly paid to veterans and generate a significant contribution to California's economy.

(2) Unfortunately, only approximately 11 percent of veterans who are eligible in California participate in these programs. California ranks 38th nationally in terms of participation rates. On a per capita basis, Texas and Florida collect 44 percent and 31 percent more respectively in disability benefits than California. This difference is primarily due to Texas and Florida having more veterans' services representatives available to assist veterans in pursuing benefit claims.

(3) It is estimated that if California could increase the participation rate to the national average of slightly over 12 percent, over \$330 million more could be returned to the state and local economy and paid to our resident veterans who need that money to support themselves and their families.

~~(4) Unfortunately, the backlog of pending claims with the federal Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) is now approximately 600,000, due in part to the surge in claims from the Iraq and Afghan wars, and consequently it can take the VBA years to process and appeal claims.~~

~~(5)~~

(4) County veteran service officers and veterans service organizations have assumed the primary responsibility to assist veterans in accessing these federal benefits, but the funding for this valuable service is scarce. Consequently, the California Department of Veterans Affairs and other state agencies and departments, as well as local government agencies, that come into regular contact with veterans and ~~returning~~ National Guard members *returning from deployment* must do a better job informing resident veterans and their dependents of their eligibility for these benefits so that veterans and their dependents can enroll and begin the application process sooner.

1 (b) ~~The department shall~~ *It is the intent of the Legislature that*
2 ~~the department~~ *establish a veteran data exchange system and enter*
3 *into memorandums of understanding or interagency agreements*
4 *with other state agencies or departments to ascertain the veteran*
5 *status of all persons receiving services, benefits, or assistance from*
6 *those state agencies and departments.*

7 (c) *Each state agency and department that provides services,*
8 *benefits, or assistance to veterans shall identify the services,*
9 *benefits, or assistance that are being provided and the number of*
10 *veterans who are using those services, benefits, or assistance, and*
11 *shall submit this information in a report to the Legislature on or*
12 *before July 1, 2010.*